

AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION

The Abstract is amended as follows.

Apparatus and methods for processing composite components using an elastomeric caul are disclosed. In one embodiment, a method of curing a prepreg on a mandrel includes forming a prepreg material on a non-planar portion of a lay-up mandrel, and providing an elastomeric caul over the prepreg; providing a vacuum bag over the prepreg and the caul, with the caul between the prepreg and a film of the vacuum bag; and stretching the elastomeric caul over the prepreg while drawing down the vacuum bag over the caul. The caul is stretched to fit snugly over the prepreg to reduce fiber deformation and wrinkling during curing. material in an initial position such that a first portion of the elastomeric caul is proximate the prepreg material on the lay-up mandrel, and a second portion of the elastomeric caul adjacent the first portion is spaced apart from the prepreg material. Next, a pressure is reduced within a space disposed between the elastomeric caul and the lay-up mandrel proximate the non planar portion. Simultaneously with the reducing of the pressure with the space, the elastomeric caul is stretched into a second position such that the second portion of the elastomeric caul is drawn proximate to at least one of the prepreg material and the lay-up mandrel.